

ICPS newsletter

Conditions and outcomes of creating an information society

The term “information society” points out only one important aspect of social transformations currently experienced by Ukraine—the transition from broad application of knowledge to mass use of means to work with information. This topic was highlighted in the speech made by Dr. Volodymyr Nikitin, ICPS Deputy Director, at the international congress “Informational Society: Development Strategy in XXI Century”, which took place in the early April 2003 in the Ukrainian House

Post-industrial, open, or global society of the third technological generation—these are only a few of numerous names invented for this form of social life emerging in recent decades. Social changes often occur in different aspects of social life simultaneously, but not equally. And this can cause social tension and conflicts. Broad application of information technologies in particular does not yet ensure the emergence of other components for creating post-industrial open democratic societies, nor successful entry onto the global arena.

Key aspects of social transformations

Social changes should be approached in a systemic way. Here are the key ones:

- the social structure of society is changing—or, to put it more precisely, a new form is emerging for its differentiation alongside the existing ones, and this new form determines a range of social demands, services, and jobs... For instance, in speaking about usage of technologies there is a division into new “strata”—users, technologists/production engineers, technology creators and personal ways of usage, and new emerging activity areas such as show business and e-commerce;
- the cultural pattern is changing too—from a textual to a “screen” one. The fact that young people are not reading much anymore is a result of this change, but it has not been properly evaluated and necessary conclusions for education have not been made. One of manifestations of this “screen” culture is the mass trend to mixing traditional forms, oriented at creating personal “cultural cocktails”;

- forms of policy decision-making are changing as well, and it is not only in terms of e-government but also, for example, the possibility to participate directly in voting, which lends wholly new aspects with regard to the form and content of democracy;
- the form and content of education are changing (distance learning means not only a change of form but also a change in content—it means work not only with knowledge but also with information; not only lessons but also work with training programs; studying not only in childhood, but during one’s whole life; etc.). Education changes its context. In the last few centuries, the main educational context was science and its developmental objectives. Today it is technological innovations that have become the new educational context;
- the labour market is changing (part-time work, working several jobs, short-term contracts) and so is its composition (emerging demand for new skills);
- the concepts of national or personal security, and human rights are changing (total control and total terrorism are potentially possible);
- the idea of strategic resources is changing (not only energy anymore but also information and free time are considered among them);
- the forms of transnational relations and developmental criteria are changing. Thus, joining international networks is an indispensable condition and development indicator from the globalisation point of view;

- new risks to mental health and the environment are emerging; information trash is a new problem, not yet fully understood.

We can name many other, no less substantial changes in other aspects of social life or international relations. But it should be emphasised that informatisation affects all important components of society. These changes bring both good and destruction of usual forms of life, labour, security etc. And these changes should be organised in order to achieve the necessary results with as few social and cultural losses as possible.

Possible changes in basic forms of organisation for modern society

It is worthwhile mentioning possible changes in human development regulation systems. There are signs that economic levers for regulation are to a great extent being supplemented and even replaced by organisational ones. For example, futile efforts to preserve ownership rights and the struggle against so-called piracy in open infrastructures, called networks, testify that (unlike in the widespread closed infrastructures of transport or communications), ownership principles and market economy laws do not work at all. These laws do not work for the systems of total state control over distribution, but on the other hand they are very effective for ensuring free exchange and competition processes. It is suspected that within modern communications systems a new significant process of creating free partnership is becoming widespread, for transferring or gifting, for instance, favourite films or music to other users.

Thus, organisational transformations become more and more important, and their forms and standards begin to influence culture and human relations, destroying various traditional relations

between the sacred and profane, the elitist and the popular.

Key capacities needed to enter an information society

For Ukraine, it is important to meet the following requirements, which would enable its entry into an information society.

Overcoming unequal capacity to join the global information society

The capacity to join the information society is determined by the following characteristics of a country:

- existence of its own policy on globalisation and informatisation processes;
- existence of systems to analyse, evaluate, and monitor information society development, and to identify emerging problems;
- existence of developed modern society infrastructures, i.e., financial, administrative, investment, distance learning, trade, etc., which need corresponding information infrastructures to be developed for them;
- an educational system through which skills are transferred for working in an information society environment;
- expansion of technological literacy within the society;
- necessary set of laws and professional codes that regulate new forms of social relations;
- appropriate level of material support to informatisation processes;
- own capacities for assimilating, initiating, and introducing technological achievements;
- high levels of investment in priority areas of information society development and social programs of change adaptation.

Most countries of the world do not have the capacities necessary to join the information society on equal terms, and thus they can be only annexes to the implementation of the programs and projects of others.

Developing the capacity to respond to global trends and conflicts

Under conditions of globalisation and expansion of information infrastructures, financial crises or political conflicts

become global almost immediately. But while some countries have appropriate mechanisms ready to withstand those negative impacts, others become their victims. The transition area where information society mechanisms are forming is very dangerous, when a country has already entered global infrastructures but does not have protective mechanisms yet.

As a result, countries pulled into globalisation:

- do not have appropriate infrastructures;
- suffer the destruction of their traditional institutions, which are with difficulties recreated by means of administrative, educational, and organisational agencies;
- do not have suitable projects or programs focused on creating the necessary infrastructures.

Only nowadays Ukraine is developing (though very partially) the capacity to be independent actor in globalisation and informatisation processes.

Technological capacity to manage change

It should be pointed out that in Ukraine:

- real government policy is not focused on modernisation processes;
- the level of material and technical support for modernisation and informatisation processes is low;
- the educational system lacks the policies necessary to introduce changes in form and content according to the demands of an information society;
- the level of overall technological competence of the population is low;
- there is no realistic policy of investment in modernisation and informatisation.

An ability to "bury" industrial society in a civilised manner

Our country lacks the financial and personnel resources to ensure a quick transition to an information society. This task requires studying the options for creating an information society, its advantages and disadvantages, risks and necessary resources, identifying priorities for resource utilisation, i.e., creation of organisational policy for building an information society.

In other words, it is necessary to answer the following questions:

- how to deal with large and powerful population groups that work with outdated technologies? How to "bury" outdated technologies and all the things that accompany them (i.e., public support, educational systems, material and technical bases)?

- how to identify priorities objectives for creating the resources for modernisation, and ensure their effective and efficient utilisation? What kind of organisational management is required?

Initiating social dialogue for joining information society

To enter the global world and develop democratic society successfully, it is necessary to facilitate extensive social dialogue on policy decision-making issues. And from this point of view, information technologies are only a tool for providing the technical means for such a dialogue.

In the West, this technology is called public policy. It is characterised by its receptiveness to various interest groups, consideration of different policy options, public discussions at all stages of the decision-making process, and implementation of these decisions by means of change management. Application of this technology is an indispensable condition for EU integration and for joining modern developed countries in general.

In Ukraine, developing an information society in broad terms has entailed efforts to introduce innovation changes by means of outdated management forms. Thus, it is necessary to develop the institution capacity in this society to make policy by means of modern management technologies. Then it will be possible to take real steps towards building an information society.

In Ukraine, establishing public policy as an institution is at its initial stage. ICPS actively promotes public policy concepts, public policy means, working with government and NGOs.

We are absolutely aware that a distorted, purely technical understanding of information society and ways to create it may cause reinforcement of totalitarian patterns in society. It is especially dangerous when technical means of control are not balanced with social institutional capacities to use the new technical means to protect the interests of various social groups.

Therefore, it is impossible to join the information society merely by technical upgrading; systemic social changes—and policies that support them—are needed. ■

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